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Culture and complexity through English as a lingua franca: rethinking competences and pedagogy in ELT

Abstract: English as a lingua franca (ELF) research highlights the complexity and fluidity of culture in intercultural communication through English. ELF users draw on, construct, and move between global, national, and local orientations towards cultural characterisations. Thus, the relationship between language and culture is best approached as situated and emergent. However, this has challenged previous representations of culture, particularly those centred predominantly on nation states, which are prevalent in English language teaching (ELT) practices and the associated conceptions of communicative and intercultural communicative competence. Two key questions which are then brought to the fore are: how are we to best understand such multifarious characterisations of culture in intercultural communication through ELF and what implications, if any, does this have for ELT and the teaching of culture in language teaching? In relation to the first question, this paper will discuss how complexity theory offers a framework for understanding culture as a constantly changing but nonetheless meaningful category in ELF research, whilst avoiding essentialism and reductionism. This underpins the response to the second question, whereby any formulations of intercultural competence offered as an aim in language pedagogy must also eschew these simplistic and essentialist cultural characterisations. Furthermore, the manner of simplification prevalent in approaches to culture in the ELT language classroom will be critically questioned. It will be argued that such simplification easily leads into essentialist representations of language and culture in ELT and an over representation of “Anglophone cultures.” The paper will conclude with a number of suggestions and examples for how such complex understandings of culture and language through ELF can be meaningfully incorporated into pedagogic practice.

Keywords: ELF, ELT, intercultural communication, culture, complexity

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วัฒนธรรมและความซับซ้อนของภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะที่เป็นภาษา กลางในการสื่อสาร (ELF): การทบทวนแนวคิดด้านความสามารถและ วิธีการสอนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ

งานวิจัยด้านการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษากลางในการสื่อสารมักจะให้ความสำคัญกับความซับซ้อนและความกลมกลืนทางวัฒนธรรมในการสื่อสารข้ามวัฒนธรรมโดยใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นสื่อผู้ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษากลางในการสื่อสารมักจะสร้างความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างลักษณะของวัฒนธรรมในระดับนานาชาติระดับชาติและระดับท้องถิ่นดังนั้นการศึกษาความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างวัฒนธรรมกับภาษาจึงควรเป็นไปในลักษณะที่ทั้งมีความคงที่แล้วและกำลังพัฒนาอย่างไรก็ตามแนวคิดนี้ขัดกับแนวคิดทางด้านวัฒนธรรมที่มีมาก่อนหน้านี้โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งแนวคิดที่ให้ความสำคัญของวัฒนธรรมในระดับชาติซึ่งปัจจุบันก็ยังเป็นแนวคิดที่ใช้ในการสอนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศและแนวคิดด้านความสามารถในการสื่อสารและการสื่อสารข้ามวัฒนธรรมประเด็นสำคัญ2ประเด็นในการศึกษาครั้งนี้คือจะทำอย่างไรเพื่อให้เกิดความเข้าใจในความหลากหลายของวัฒนธรรมในการสื่อสารที่ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษากลางและจะมีผลกระทบอย่างไรต่อการสอนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศและการสอนวัฒนธรรมควบคู่ไปกับการสอนภาษาในการตอบคำถามประเด็นที่หนึ่งงานวิจัยนี้จะศึกษาทฤษฎีด้านความซับซ้อนที่เป็นตัวกำหนดกรอบความเข้าใจทางวัฒนธรรมที่มีการเปลี่ยนแปลงอยู่เสมอแต่ยังมีความสำคัญต่องานวิจัยด้านการสอนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศโดยหลีกเลี่ยงรูปแบบที่ใช้อยู่เดิมและการลดทอนความสำคัญซึ่งสอดคล้องกับการตอบคำถามในประเด็นที่สองคือการกำหนดหลักการใดๆด้านความสามารถในการสื่อสารข้ามวัฒนธรรมซึ่งกำหนดไว้เป็นเป้าหมายในการสอนภาษาจะต้องหลีกเลี่ยงการทำให้ความแตกต่างทางวัฒนธรรมเป็นเรื่องไม่จำเป็นหรือเป็นเรื่องง่าย ๆ การทำให้วัฒนธรรมเป็นสิ่งที่ไม่มีความสำคัญซึ่งเป็นวิธีที่ใช้อย่างแพร่หลายในการการสอนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศจะกลายเป็นประเด็นขัดแย้งการลดทอนความสำคัญจะนำไปสู่แนวคิดในการสอนภาษาและวัฒนธรรมที่ใช้อยู่เดิมและให้ความสำคัญกับวัฒนธรรมในภาษาอังกฤษมากเกินไปงานวิจัยนี้จะสรุปข้อเสนอแนะต่างๆด้านความซับซ้อนในการเข้าใจภาษาและวัฒนธรรมผ่านการสอนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศว่ามีความสำคัญอย่างไรต่อวิธีการจัดการเรียนการสอน

คำสำคัญ: ภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะที่เป็นภาษากลางในการสื่อสาร (ELF), วิธีการสอนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ, การสื่อสารข้ามวัฒนธรรม, วัฒนธรรม, ความซับซ้อน

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1 Introduction

As the field of English as a lingua franca (ELF) research expands, providing increasing amounts of data documenting the variable, fluid, and dynamic commu-

nicative practices of participants in ELF interactions, so too do the implications for other fields of both research and practice in applied linguistics. The focus of this paper is to explore how ELF studies can contribute to our understanding of the relationship between culture and language in intercultural communication and what implications this has for teaching practice. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to demonstrate why an understanding of culture is relevant to ELF research, and vice versa, particularly given the difficulties in defining culture and the often essentialist manner in which the concept has been used (Section 2). To aid in this explanation, the notion of complexity in relation to culture will be introduced and a discussion of how complexity theory can inform this will be offered (Section 3). Complexity theory will further be used to explore the relationship between culture, language, and intercultural communication (Section 4). The fluid and varied characterisation of these three terms, i.e., language, communication, and culture, and the relationships between them gives rise to the need to reassess how culture is approached in English language teaching (ELT). Crucially, it will be suggested that we need a revised understanding of the types of competences language learners/users need, moving away from a priori specification of a restricted range of linguistic features related to a particular “code.” An assessment of a range of alternative conceptions of communicative and intercultural competence which all share a recognition of the fluid and situated nature of intercultural communication will be undertaken, concluding with a focus on the notion of intercultural awareness. Similarly the role of culture and the intercultural in current ELT practice and materials will also be critiqued and alternate approaches considered (Section 5). Although the ideological significance of national cultures, and the resultant imbalance towards “Anglophone” cultures, needs to be acknowledged, it will be argued that this provides an overly restrictive approach for many learners of English which is unlikely to reflect their experiences of intercultural communication through ELF. Finally, it is argued that it is the role of language educators to question and challenge the existing status quo and offer alternatives. Insights from ELF research can support such challenges and alternatives.

2 Culture in intercultural communication through ELF

ELF is approached here from a function perspective in which it is viewed as the use of English for intercultural communication between speakers of different first languages (cf. Seidlhofer 2011: 7). However, as a number of recent discussions

of ELF have noted (Ehrenreich 2011; Björkman 2013; Baird et al. 2014), it is important to make clear that this does not entail that communication involving ELF is unique or different from other forms of intercultural communication. Nonetheless, ELF offers an interesting and productive field for investigating the relationships between language and culture as communication through ELF is currently probably the most common scenario for intercultural communication: see, for example, Crystal (2008) on the huge number of English L2 users globally. Therefore, just as a range of research fields in intercultural communication have made productive use of the concept of culture, we would expect it to be equally productive in ELF research. While culture has been defined in many different, at times even contradictory ways, and a fuller characterisation of culture will be provided below, for the present it can be approached as a shared, but constantly changing and negotiated, set of beliefs, values, ideologies, discourses, and practices. As well as culture providing a fruitful concept in exploring ELF from a research perspective, earlier studies have demonstrated that culture is also seen as relevant to participants in ELF communication in their own explanations of their experiences (Meierkord 2002; Pölzl and Seidlhofer 2006; Baker 2009, Baker 2011).

Accounts of culture in ELF research (see, e.g., Pölzl and Seidlhofer 2006; Baker 2009; Ehrenreich 2009) have generally eschewed essentialist characterisations of culture and language in which culture is reduced to a language, culture, nation correlation. Essentialist approaches would, for example, see English as “containing” the culture of Anglophone countries, however they might be defined, within its linguistic structure (see Wierzbicka [2006] and Gu [2009] for contemporary examples of this reductionist perspective). These correlations are obviously problematic for global languages, such as English, that are used in a wide range of cultural settings and are not necessarily associated a priori with any particular nation. However, it is equally problematic to propose that this makes communication through ELF culturally neutral, as for example House (2014) has done, or that the relationship between culture and language exists on a continuum with culture drawn on when necessary and abandoned when not (Meierkord 2002; Kirkpatrick 2007). Such views represent a fundamental misunderstanding of communication. As Phipps and Guilherme (2004) note in relation to intercultural communication, and Baker (2011) in specific relation to ELF, there is no such thing as “neutral” communication, intercultural or otherwise. All communication involves participants, settings, purposes, linguistic and other communicative medium choices, none of which are culturally neutral. Even in the most apparently functional of social practices, such as buying a cup of coffee, there will be culturally influenced expectations and scripts or schemata for such interactions. These may be at the micro level of directly experi-

enced local cultural expectations or at more abstracted national or even global level. Of course, this is not to suggest that culture is always a relevant category of analysis or especially salient to participants. There will be many occasions where a focus on culture would tell us little of interest about the interaction. Furthermore, we need to guard against prior assumptions about *how* culture should be understood, as will be discussed in more detail below. Nonetheless, culture, along with other aspects of communication and context, is always present in the instances of intercultural communication studied in ELF research, just as it is with all natural communication.

Therefore, to account for the relationship between language and culture in intercultural communication through ELF, it is necessary to view it from a more complex perspective than the culturally deterministic or culturally neutral perspective described above. In particular, while recognising the influence of pre-established relationships, it is crucial that the connections between language and culture are explored as situated in the instances of communication investigated. One approach within ELF studies has been to make use of the notion of communities of practice to account for the temporary and transient communities often associated with communication through ELF (Seidlhofer 2007, Seidlhofer 2011; Cogo and Dewey 2012; Kalocsai 2014). However, with the exception of Ehrenreich (2009) and Kalocsai (2014), there has been little empirical exploration of how the concept can add to our understanding of ELF data and in particular there has been almost no discussion of how culture, community, and communication might interrelate.

Outside of mainstream ELF research in critical perspectives towards intercultural communication and globalisation, there has been an extensive discussion of the role of culture, context, and community in communication (e.g., Pennycook 2007, Pennycook 2010; Blommaert 2010; Holliday 2011; Canagarajah 2013). Notions such as transcultural flows (Pennycook 2007), translocal spaces (Canagarajah 2013), and polycentricity (Blommaert 2010) underscore the importance of recognising the fluidity of relationships between languages and cultures and the emergent nature of any observed relationships. Extending this discussion to communication through ELF, this does not entail that participants in communication through ELF are free to draw on or create whatever cultural resources or references they wish. Rather, there is a constant tension between “fluidity” and “fixity” (Pennycook 2007) with more traditional “normative” cultural conceptions, often at the national level, existing alongside more dynamic and emergent cultural practices. In specific relation to ELF, Baker (2009: 567) makes use of a number of these concepts to propose that “cultural frames of reference [are] perceived of and made use of in a hybrid, mixed, and liminal manner, drawing on and moving between global, national, local, and individual

orientations.”¹ In addition to these multiple frames of reference, Baker (2009) provides data demonstrating emergent and situated relationships between language and culture that could not have been specified prior to each particular instance of communication. It might therefore be better to view ELF as *transcultural* communication rather than *intercultural* since it is not at all obvious what “cultures” communication through ELF is “between.” *Trans* is thus a more appropriate prefix and spatial metaphor than *inter* as *trans* implies a less static view of cultures with transcultural communication occurring “through” and “across” rather than “between” cultures as implied in *intercultural*. However, for the sake of consistency, especially in the context of/relation to ELT discourse, the term intercultural communication will be retained in this paper, with the caveat given here.

3 Culture as complex and emergent

The characterisation of culture and intercultural communication offered so far, in which culture is seen as multiple, dynamic, and constantly under negotiation, results in a new set of problems. Most significantly, does culture as a concept have any theoretical worth left? Should we conclude, as Scollon et al. (2012: 10) do, that “the idea of culture is mostly too large a concept to really capture the complexity of interdiscourse communication”?² While we may accept that “folk” views of communication make use of culture as an explanatory term, is there any value for researchers beyond this? Are we making the mistake of conflating folk categories with analytical research categories (Brubaker and Cooper 2000) in perusing culture as an idea?³ There are a number of responses to these valid concerns. Firstly, as much postmodernist thinking argues, any understanding of social practices will always be partial and situated. There is no one all-encompassing explanation “out there” waiting to be discovered. Secondly, however, this does

1 This quotation should not be interpreted as suggesting that there are individual cultures, but rather that individuals will have different orientations towards shared cultural resources and references.

2 Scollon et al. (2012) prefer to use the term interdiscourse communication as they see much of what is termed intercultural communication as the interaction of different discourse systems rather than cultural systems. However, they still make extensive reference to culture as an explanatory notion and it is debatable whether discourse is any less complex and unwieldy as a category of analysis.

3 This is not to suggest that “folk” categories should be ignored by researchers. In social research they are crucial. Nonetheless, it is important that we distinguish between participant-derived categories and researcher-derived categories.

not result in our explanations having to be ad-hoc or idiosyncratic. Rather, it will be argued here that the related notions of complexity and emergence offer a manner of conceiving of culture and its relationship to language and communication as both fluid and systematic at the same time.

While a detailed discussion of complexity theory is beyond the scope of this article, a description of a number of fundamental principles should serve to illustrate its potential for understanding culture. Miller and Page (2007) provide the following basic characterisation of complex systems, “the field of complex systems challenges the notion that by perfectly understanding the behaviour of each component part of a system we will then understand the system as a whole. One and one may well make two, but to really understand two we must know both about the nature of ‘one’ and the meaning of ‘and’ ” (Miller and Page 2007: 3). This quotation underscores that we cannot understand a system through reducing it to individual parts and that crucially the relationships, i.e., the “and,” between the parts is an integral part of the system. Larsen-Freeman (2011), similarly, emphasises the fluidity and dynamism of complex systems writing that “complexity theory seeks to explain complex, dynamic, open, adaptive, self-organising, nonlinear systems. It focuses on the close interplay between the emergence of structure on one hand and process or change on the other” (Larsen-Freeman 2011: 52).

Closely related is the commensurable notion of emergence which “occurs only when the activities of the parts do not simply sum to give the activity of the whole” (Holland 1998: 147). Thus, this highlights again that emergent phenomena cannot be reduced to their individual components or parts. In other words, as Miller and Page (2007: 45) explain, “emergence is a phenomenon whereby well-formulated aggregate behaviour arises from localised, individual behaviour.” In addition, Hopper (1998: 158) in relation to language and grammar explains how emergent systems are crucially distinct from what he terms “a priori views,” in that they do not make use of pre-existing rules and categories. Rather “rules” and categories can be described *a posteriori* based on observed regularities, but such rules are no more than repeated or sedimented features which give the illusion of systematicity. They may currently appear regular and stable, but they can change at any point and so are fundamentally different to rules as conceived in a priori systems. Similar points about rules, norms, and variation are also made by Pitzl (2012) in relation to ELF and creativity, and Baird et al. (2014) link the idea of emergence directly with accounting for language and communication in ELF.

Following this approach we can conceptualise cultures as social systems that emerge through individuals’ participation in the world giving rise to sets of shared beliefs, values, attitudes, and practices. This sharedness comes about through

the social sedimentation (Hopper 1998; Tomasello 2008) of these particular beliefs, values, attitudes, and practices, whereby repeated usage gives rise to the appearance of norms and patterns. These beliefs, values, attitudes, and practices are “inescapably intersubjective” (Sealey and Carter 2004: 154). In other words, they exist in relationship to each other and through interactions between individuals. Relationships are thus a crucial part of the system, with culture emerging from “networks” of individual interactions (Taylor 2001) but not being reducible to any one individual. Equally importantly given the high degree of individual variation, cultures are constantly in change, with new beliefs, values, attitudes, and practices becoming socially sedimented while older ones fall out of use. At the same time, this social sedimentation provides a degree of stability. However, the constant changes that are part of the “system” mean a full account is never possible and the system is in a constantly emergent state with no fixed end point.

There are a number of important advantages to characterising cultures in this way. Emergence and complexity offers a manner of approaching culture as a system and thus a meaningful theoretical and analytical concept without adopting an overly deterministic or structuralist approach. Cilliers (1998: 136) comments on the “fruitfulness of combining complexity theory with post-structuralism” in scientific enquiry and Taylor (2001: 155) likewise notes that “emergent self-organizing systems do act as a whole, yet do not totalize. Furthermore, emergence involves an irreducible unpredictability that creates the opportunity for aleatory events.”⁴ We can therefore avoid idiosyncratic conclusions about culture, viewing it as complex, multidimensional, dynamic, and irreducible but nonetheless a recognisable “whole,” even if it is a constantly changing and contested whole. Additionally, we can discuss the sedimentation of cultural practices and products as socially emergent “systems” without being restricted to sets of underlying *a priori* rules and boundaries. We can also avoid the ecological fallacy of ascribing cultures to individuals, as culture is emergent rather than reducible to individuals. Finally, in theorising culture and complexity, we can avoid essentialist and binary distinctions between “our” culture and “other” cultures in focusing on relationships, interrelations, and the blurred fluid boundaries of cultural “systems.” In other words, cultures as complex systems interrelate and influence each other and so there are no fixed lines between one system and another.

One caveat needs to be added here. Treating culture as a complex system is not to suggest that it should be viewed as a physical entity like physical complex systems (e.g., biological systems) or even that it should be modelled quantita-

⁴ The notions of aleatory (unpredictable) events links complexity theory closely with chaos theory, although there is not space here to discuss this in detail (see, for example, Larsen-Freeman and Cameron [2008] and Larsen-Freeman [2011]).

tively as has been done with other kinds of social systems (cf. Miller and Page 2007). Rather, culture as a complex system is employed as a useful metaphor and heuristic device. However, this does not undermine the power of complexity or culture as concepts. The lack of physical characteristics does not diminish the power of many social systems in our daily lives and of course such systems are often the result of, and result in, physical manifestations.

As regards the relationship between culture and language, a similar perspective can be taken in which culture is seen as a complex system which interacts with language, which in turn is also seen as a complex system (Larsen-Freeman 2011).⁵ Importantly, both these complex systems are influenced by each other and this is another key feature of complex systems perspectives. Just as the relationships between the components within systems are a fundamental part of systems, so the relationships between systems are also crucial to the characteristics of systems (Taylor 2001; Larsen-Freeman and Cameron 2008). This further blurs the boundaries between different systems. This enables us to treat culture and language as separable, therefore avoiding essentialist accounts that conflate language and culture, while at the same time recognising their interrelatedness. Complex and emergent accounts of culture and its relationship to language are commensurable with current thinking in intercultural communication research and ELF, as described above, in viewing language and culture as closely linked but not inseparable. Indeed, the global use of English as a lingua franca in a huge variety of scenarios brings to the fore the limitations of associating a particular language, English, with any one culture or even group of cultures, i.e., the Anglophone world. A complex, dynamic, and emergent account of culture also fits well with the limited empirical research on ELF and culture so far (Meierkord 2002; Pölzl and Seidlhofer 2006; Baker 2009, Baker 2011, Baker forthcoming; Ehrenreich 2009).

4 Rethinking intercultural competence

One of the fundamental implications of this dynamic view of culture and language in communication is related to the notion of intercultural competence. Intercultural competence has formed a key part of intercultural communication research both generally and in relation to language education. Within language pedagogy, the most influential approach has probably been that of Byram's (1997)

⁵ There is not space here to give a full account of language as a complex system, but see Baird et al. (2014) for a discussion of this in relation to ELF, and Sealey and Carter (2004), Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008), and Larsen-Freeman (2011) in relation to language.

notion of intercultural communicative competence (ICC), which extended the idea of communicative competence to account for the intercultural dimension to second language learning and use. ICC has served a crucial role in making language educators more aware of incorporating culture into language teaching in a systematic and detailed manner. While this is not the place to engage in an extensive evaluation and critique of Byram's concept of ICC (see Baker 2011, Baker 2012b; Holliday 2011), ICC is an example of intercultural competence that is very much based on structuralist national language and culture correlations. In other words the focus is on competences that relate to clear language and culture connections at the national level, for example English as related to the "culture" of the United Kingdom (Byram 1997: 112). Although many of the skills, attitudes, and knowledge outlined in ICC may be of relevance to communication involving a lingua franca, there needs to be acknowledgment that lingua franca communication is less likely to involve clearly established relationships between a particular language and a particular culture. Indeed, the notion of pre-established relationships between languages and cultures is being increasingly questioned in a number of strands of applied linguistics, not only ELF, as outlined previously. This needs to be recognised when conceptualising the appropriate skills, attitudes, and knowledge deemed necessary for intercultural competence, something that is missing from notions such as ICC.

These changing ideas on the relationships between languages and cultures have resulted in a range of alternative approaches to intercultural competence that explicitly engage with fluidity and situated relationships. In recognition of the diverse range of registers, genres, and contexts of language use, Blommaert (2010: 103) notes that "no one knows all of a language" and that "partial competence" is the norm. He suggests that rather than focus on competences in specific languages it is better to conceive of competence in terms of repertoires and resources which enable us to do particular things with a range of linguistic and pragmatic features. However, while the notion of a "multilingual repertoire," as conceived by Blommaert, is attractive and underscores the importance of recognising the plurilingual nature of much intercultural communication, the idea is not expanded on in detail and the focus is still very much on linguistic aspects at the expense of other aspects of intercultural competence.

Kramsch (2009) and Kramsch (2011) propose a reflexive perspective that addresses the ideological, historic, and aesthetic aspects of intercultural communication through the idea of symbolic competence. Symbolic competence critiques the reifying distinctions between learners' cultures/languages and other "target" cultures/languages, which are part of Byram's ICC and also Kramsch's (1993) own earlier notion of "third places." Symbolic competence responds to these critiques by proposing that "the notion of third culture must be seen less as a PLACE than

as a symbolic PROCESS of meaning-making that sees beyond the dualities of national languages (L1–L2) and national cultures (C1–C2)” (Kramsch 2011: 354). Thus, symbolic competence is described as a “dynamic, flexible and locally contingent competence” (Kramsch 2009: 200). This competence involves a reflexive stance towards intercultural communication “embracing multiple, changing and conflicting discourse worlds” (Kramsch 2011: 356) and crucially a critical awareness of the symbolic systems being used to construct any representation of culture. Although Kramsch does not address ELF, such an approach to intercultural competence would seem well suited to ELF scenarios, in which evaluations of successful communication are likely to be equally “dynamic, flexible and locally contingent.”

The notion of competence itself is questioned by Pennycook (2007) in relation to global Englishes. While the competence/performance distinction is an important and wide-ranging debate, of particular relevance to the argument here is that from an emergent perspective competence does not precede performance. Instead, competence emerges in relation to “a wide array of social, cultural and discursive forces” (Pennycook 2007: 60) and does not reside as an internal abstract property of individuals. Canagarajah (2013: 173), following this argument, responds by combining the notions of competence and performative in his proposal for “performative competence.” As with Pennycook, he rejects Chomskyan mental representations of competence in favour of a competence that relates to the *how* rather than *what* of communication and emphasises its practice-based nature. In focusing on performance and procedural knowledge, performative competence is much closer to the attitudes, knowledge, and skills of ICC outlined by Byram (1997), as Canagarajah (2013: 173) acknowledges. Like Byram’s ICC, performative competence is quite broad in what it covers, moving from specific interactional strategies to broader notions of language and social awareness. However, unlike ICC’s concern with distinct cultures and languages, performative competence explicitly explores multilingual communicators’ or translinguals’ (to use Canagarajah’s terminology) “competence for plural language norms and mobile semiotic resources” (Canagarajah 2013: 173). Crucially, Canagarajah also emphasises the need to raise awareness of performative competence and the associated strategies in teaching but not to prescriptively teach specific strategies, since “strategies are situated and practice-based. They cannot be implemented in a product-orientated and a priori manner” (Canagarajah 2013: 186). However, Canagarajah’s rather selective account of ELF research as variety-focused and “acultural” – something which this paper has hopefully shown not to be the case – limits the applicability of his ideas to the present discussion.

A number of the ideas presented by Canagarajah have been present in earlier discussions of intercultural competence which are specifically related to

communication through ELF. Intercultural awareness (ICA) (Baker 2011) builds on Byram's ICC and its broad conception of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed for successful intercultural communication. However, with ICA there is an explicit recognition of the need to move away from essentialist nation-based correlations of language and culture and a focus on the fluid, complex, and emergent nature of the relationship in intercultural communication through ELF. A basic characterisation is given below.

ICA is an understanding of the role culturally based forms, practices and frames of reference can have in intercultural communication, and an ability to put these conceptions into practice in a flexible and context specific manner in communication. (adapted from Baker 2011: 202)

The second part of this definition emphasises the need for flexibility in relation to emergent communicative practices and socio-cultural relations, which is distinct from Byram's ICC. Like Canagarajah's (2013) performative competence, details are not specified of what "forms," "practices," and "frames of reference" should be understood, since this is not possible. Although the *types* of knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed can be outlined in advance (Baker 2011), and would include many of the features discussed so far, the particular resources needed will be specific to each instance of communication. Interculturally aware communicators need to make use of existing repertoires of resources alongside and adapted to an array of situated and emergent resources particular to each instant of communication. ICA also attempts to avoid problematic associations with the term competence in utilizing the more loosely defined and holistic term *awareness*. Furthermore, while ICA may involve the types of interactional competence, related to specific turn-by-turn conversational strategies, that has been the focus of ELF research (e.g., Kaur 2009; Cogo and Dewey 2012), like ICC and performative competence, it takes a broader more ethnographic approach to communication than solely focusing on features that can be observed in the interaction. This alternative view of intercultural competence or intercultural awareness has important implications for language pedagogy and ELF which will be taken up in the following section.

5 Challenging culture in ELT pedagogy: ELF and ICA

One of the foundations of many discussions on the goals and aims of ELT is communicative competence, particularly as conceived in Canale and Swain's (1980)

seminal paper. However, the narrow and restricted view of the social and cultural offered in communicative competence has been the subject of much criticism (Brumfit 2001; Leung 2005; Kramsch 2009; Widdowson 2012; among others). Intercultural competence and particularly intercultural communicative competence (Byram 1997) have, as previously discussed, attempted to address some of these limitations in relation to language pedagogy by expanding our conception of communicative competence. Nonetheless, in relation to pedagogy there are a number of significant issues that still remain.

Firstly, there is the practical question of how much influence descriptions of intercultural communicative competence have had in ELT. Leung (2005) highlights the “scaled-down” notion of the social-cultural in communicative competence, as conceived in ELT, based on the intuitions of a small number of materials writers and teachers in both teacher education texts and teaching materials. Content analysis of ELT textbooks continues to underscore the limited range of settings in which English is portrayed and the restricted cultural representations (Cortazzi and Jin 1999; Vettorel 2010). To take an example from contemporary ELT materials, *Global* (Clanfield 2009) recognises the global role of English and emphasises the importance of non-native speakers. Nonetheless, when discussing literature and providing examples of literature written in English, the text still focuses on the Anglophone world, missing an important opportunity for more complex socio-cultural contextualisations of English.

Secondly, even when the importance of the intercultural is recognised, given the pressures and constraints teachers often face, it remains low on teachers’ list of priorities (Sercu et al. 2005; Young and Sachdev 2011). This is unsurprising due to the lack of focus on the intercultural in teacher training, teaching materials, teaching syllabi, and language testing. Furthermore, Young and Sachdev (2011: 83) note that there has been little empirical research on the “uptake and perceived applicability of this [intercultural] approach.” This can result in culture being relegated to the “fifth skill” (see Tomalin [2008] for an example of this) tacked on in addition to the other four skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing). The problems with viewing culture and the intercultural as a “fifth skill” added on to the other skills as a separate entity have long been noted (e.g., Kramsch 1993). As has hopefully been made clear in the discussion here, culture is a central part of intercultural communication and intercultural competence and cannot be dealt with in isolation from other aspects of communication.⁶

⁶ Indeed, the whole notion of being able to separate skills along the categories of listening and speaking, reading and writing creates false dichotomies which hinder rather than help teaching and learning (see Brumfit [2001] for a fuller discussion).

Thirdly, where teachers or teaching material attempt to make the intercultural more central in ELT, it is questionable how much this involves a recognition of the variation inherent in intercultural communication (or other kinds of communication) and the need for a situated emergent understanding of culture and language. Taking another current ELT text as an example, *English Unlimited* (Doff 2011), the description claims “a focus on intercultural competence as a ‘fifth skill’” (which, as already noted, is problematic) but later in the same paragraph goes on to state that the CEF (*Common European Framework of Reference*) is at the book’s core. Given the focus on “native speaker” norms, expectations, and proficiency in the CEF, this would suggest a concept of communication more in line with earlier restricted understandings of communicative competence. These examples are offered as illustrations of how within ELT the dominant view is still related to a limited understanding of communicative or intercultural communicative competence and reflects a static view of culture and language in which a priori associations between English and its cultural contextualisations are made. However, as ELF research has shown, this is unlikely to match the communicative experiences of many users of English in intercultural ELF settings.

Returning to the notions of intercultural competence and intercultural awareness, the range of skills, knowledge, and attitudes suggested in these conceptions of communication would indicate that an alternative to approaching culture in ELT is needed. Baker (2012a, Baker 2012b, Baker forthcoming) has explored how intercultural awareness can be translated into classroom practice and so the argument will not be repeated in detail here. In brief, a range of opportunities to investigate the relationships between culture, language, and communication in classrooms are presented, including:

1. exploring the complexity of local cultures;
2. exploring cultural representations in language learning materials;
3. exploring cultural representations in the media and arts both online and in more “traditional” mediums;
4. making use of cultural informants;
5. engaging in intercultural communication both face to face and electronically.

This list is not exhaustive but rather presents examples of how culture and language can be integrated into ELT classrooms in a non-essentialist manner. A crucial part of each of the areas outlined is that any representations of culture presented are treated critically. Thus, for example, in investigating images of cultures in textbooks, learners and teachers ask what is represented (and what is not), why this has been chosen, and to what extent this reflects their own individual experiences of using English. All accounts and representations of culture are treated as necessarily subjective and partial. This does not undermine their valid-

ity but makes it clear to learners that there will always be alternative ways of presenting and enacting cultures in communication. Furthermore, any experiences of engaging in intercultural communication are viewed as important not just for practice in using English but as examples of intercultural communicative experiences which can serve as a source for subsequent classroom exploration and discussion.

Approaches such as that outlined in intercultural awareness offer alternatives to essentialist national representations of culture in ELT material and also suggest critical ways of exploring existing materials. By making learners aware of the multiple and complex nature of culture, learners are also given the opportunity to develop the reflexive stance to intercultural communication emphasised in Kramsch's (2009) symbolic competence. It is important to stress that national conceptions of culture are not ignored in such approaches, but rather they are recognised as one particular way of characterising culture alongside and possibly in conflict with others. By reflecting on their own experiences, learners are also encouraged to recognise the limitations of applying national characterisations of cultures to individuals. The emphasis on the critical dimension to understanding culture is closely aligned with critical pedagogy, in which learners and teachers are encouraged to both explore and challenge dominant discourses (Edge 2006; Phipps and Guilherme 2004). Thus, for ELT this entails exploring the dominant discourses around Anglophone "cultures" and nations and challenging this with alternative concepts of the cultural contexts and settings of English. This also involves exploring notions of competence associated with "native speakers" and a limited range of linguistics features and challenging it with wider plurilingual and transcultural ideas of competence, performance, and awareness. Of course, this is necessarily a subjective and political, in the widest sense of term, process, but any selection of content and goals is inevitably ideologically driven, whether it is explicitly recognised or not. Indeed, in many of the current discussions of intercultural communication and English language teaching and use, including within ELF, there is a growing consensus around the role of education to be critical and challenge the status quo, making learners aware of other ways to conceive of the culture, communication, and language relationship (e.g., Pennycook 2007; Byram 2008; Kramsch 2009; Baker 2011, Baker 2012a, Baker 2012b, Baker forthcoming; Dewey 2012; Canagarajah 2013; Jenkins 2014).⁷

An example of how this can be put into practice is presented in Baker (2012a) and Baker (forthcoming) in which Thai learners of English at a Thai university

7 These challenges to national conceptions of culture and language do not only apply to second or foreign languages but also to first languages.

took part in an online course in intercultural communication and global Englishes. The course was offered as an extra, optional learning activity and delivered online with tutors from the students' university and one tutor from the United Kingdom, who was also the researcher. The participants were 31 undergraduate English majors (all Thai L1) and 6 English teachers (4 Thai L1 English teachers and 2 English L1 English teachers). The materials were specifically developed to exploit the opportunities outlined in the five areas presented previously and as such the focus was more on cultural content and awareness than linguistic knowledge (although linguistic elements of Global Englishes such as the LFC [Jenkins 2000] and lexico-grammatical features of ELF and World Englishes were included). They also used locally relevant materials (although this did not only entail local content) and hence the emphasis was on cultural content from Thailand, ASEAN, and Asia but not ignoring the Anglophone world. The course was divided into ten topics delivered over ten weeks.

1. Defining culture
2. Intercultural communication
3. Cultural stereotypes and generalisations in communication
4. The individual and culture
5. English as a global language
6. Exploring my own culture
7. Intercultural communication and the Internet
8. Comparing cultures: politeness
9. Globalisation and transcultural global flows
10. Intercultural awareness

These topics dealt with central areas of intercultural communication such as the relationship between culture and language and in particular the hybrid and fluid nature of culture and language in intercultural communication. This involved students exploring their own culture in more detail to raise awareness of the complexities of culture and language in their surrounding environment as well as the role this had in their identity construction. They were asked to reflect on the role of generalisations in intercultural communication and cultural comparisons as well as the potentially negative impact of stereotyping and essentialism. Students considered English from a global Englishes perspective including English as a lingua franca and varieties of World Englishes, such as Indian English, Nigerian English, and Hong Kong English. The course also included examining the growing role of online intercultural communication, the use of English to create and communicate hybrid cultural artefacts and practices in “transcultural flows” (for example code-mixing or translanguaging in local hip-hop), and the relationship between Englishes and globalisation. Additionally, the students

explored the types of skills, knowledge, and attitudes detailed in ICA in relation to their own experiences of intercultural communication. Alongside this content, opportunities for intercultural communication were presented through a discussion forum and live chat sessions.

This course demonstrated the feasibility of developing ELT materials that take a perspective that incorporates insights from contemporary ELF research and intercultural communication studies and moves away from the typical Anglophone focus. Most importantly, the course was well received by the participants. In a post-course questionnaire and interviews, the majority of both the teachers and the students expressed very positive attitudes towards the course. Many of the teachers said they would use such materials in their own teaching and the students found the course interesting and relevant. In relation to learning outcomes, most students expressed a greater awareness of global Englishes and the processes of intercultural communication. However, Anglophone varieties of English were still regarded in higher prestige by some students and it was also not clear to what extent students and teachers understood global Englishes as representing many different varieties of English or the varied use of English, as documented in ELF research (see Baker [2012a] for further details).

Clearly, one example of this kind cannot be generalised to all ELT settings. Nonetheless, there may be elements of the five strands, presented earlier, or the ten topics, given above, which have relevance in other settings both at tertiary level and at school level. Furthermore, given the generally positive evaluations given by students and teachers, the question arises as to why such globally orientated approaches to English and cultural content form such a minor part of current ELT materials and practices.

Before concluding, a final point needs to be made as regards the relationship between simplification and complexity in relation to pedagogy. The account of culture in ELT pedagogy given here is clearly quite a demanding one that involves approaching cultures as multifarious and complex phenomena from the beginning. However, much pedagogic practice involves the selection, simplification, and fixing of content to make it manageable in the classroom.⁸ This results in a tension that is clearly articulated by Brumfit (2001: 35), who argues that “[p]rocesses of making general statements, of fixing and formalising, and ultimately of stressing particular features for particular effects are inherent in the

⁸ The same point can be made in relation to intercultural communication; we cannot immediately deal with the complexity of each interlocutor and need to make use of generalisations. However, as with pedagogy, it is essential that we treat generalisations as just that, and are able to critically examine them and move beyond them when dealing with individual interlocutors (see Baker 2011).

simplification process, but they also have inherent risks. Thus simplification results in a reliance on generalisations; generalisations can easily degenerate into stereotyping, and insensitive stereotyping rapidly becomes caricature.” Brumfit’s answer is not to avoid simplification, since without it, he argues, there will only be confusion, but that any simplification must be contextually justified and continually debated in relation to changing contexts. Therefore, in presenting culture as related to intercultural communication, pedagogic practitioners and researchers need to critically evaluate what aspects of culture are focused on and what are excluded or left for later. Such decisions can only be made locally and, as with arguments related to features of competence and awareness, cannot be specified in detail in advance. Nonetheless, given that most teachers’, learners’, and users’ experiences of English are likely to be in lingua franca scenarios, exploring the relationship between language, culture, and communication in ELF would seem an appropriate initial focus including the attendant notions of complexity and diversity. This is not a rejection of Anglophone contexts of English use as has been claimed (Sybing 2011), but rather a questioning of the a priori assumption that they are most relevant to most learners given what we know about current uses of English.

6 Conclusion

This paper has made use of the notion of complexity to explore how we can conceptualise the relationship between language and culture in intercultural communication through ELF. While the complexity of the relationship is not unique to ELF scenarios, ELF research has been well positioned to investigate alternatives to more static and essentialist approaches. Examinations of complexity and culture from a complexity theory perspective help to frame the notion of culture in a non-essentialist and dynamic manner that can inform researchers in ELF and applied linguistics more generally. By viewing culture as a complex system which is in a continuous state of emergence, we avoid simplistic and stereotypical accounts of culture which can obscure rather than aid our understanding of intercultural communication. Similarly, by approaching the relationship between language, culture, and communication as the interaction of various complex systems in which the links are created in situ, we arrive at a non-essentialist perspective which is well suited for exploring lingua franca communication.

Using the notion of complexity in its more general sense (as opposed to the technical sense described in the previous paragraph) also demonstrates the restricted view of communicative competence and intercultural communicative competence that has been made use of in language teaching and particularly ELT.

Alternative views of intercultural communicative competence, or rather intercultural awareness, emphasise the need for a range of skills, knowledge, and attitudes which can be employed in a flexible, fluid, and context-specific manner in intercultural communication. This approach recognises the complexity of intercultural communication through ELF (but not only ELF) and problematizes specifying a priori a particular set of linguistic, communicative, or sociocultural features that need to be learnt and then applied to intercultural communication. This leads to a questioning of current presentations of culture in ELT. Just as communicative competence and intercultural communicative competence are based on overly simplified views of communication, so too are presentations of culture in ELT materials and textbooks. These simplifications include a focus on Anglophone settings of English use at the expense of the multitude of global uses of English, including ELF scenarios. They also include a static and often essentialist view of culture and language as related to nations and native speakers and a relegation of culture to an additional, and by implication, optional “fifth skill” in teacher training. The need for selection, focus, and a degree of simplification is of course an essential part of teaching, but the tension this creates with the complexity of intercultural communication as experienced by users of ELF cannot be ignored. Most importantly this paper has critiqued the relevance of current selections, foci, and simplifications in relation to culture and the English language in ELT and the lack of representation of ELF scenarios. Furthermore, one of the roles of all education, including language education, is to challenge and expand learners’ horizons, not repeat the status quo and restrict learners. The absence of culture and intercultural communication, particularly as related to ELF, is a significant “blind spot” in ELT and is an issue pedagogic researchers, teachers, and teacher trainers need to give greater attention to. In so doing, ELT will be more responsive to learners’ needs and uses of English.

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Bionote

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